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ABSTRACT

Even at an early age, children are guided by their intuitions as they write. Intuitions are the culmination of perceptions that have been internalized and synthesized into patterns. Furthermore, they take time to develop. Consequently, if systematic instruction is to play a part in the formation of intuitions about written language then it must start early and be continuous. Instruction in paragraphing depends in part on how much experience the child has had writing sentences. Nevertheless, paragraph instruction in the elementary grades should focus on invention, writing a paragraph on one subject, and the visual form of the paragraph. The teacher should concentrate on training the student to become an accurate observer. The student can be taught to place things in classes and ultimately to develop generalizations about these classes in the form of statements by listing reasons for placing them in these groups. Development of the paragraph should be introduced only in terms of adding facts about the same subject. At the secondary school level, continued practice in using various categorizing principles to sort and classify information should be encouraged. Instead of simply generating a main idea, students can be made aware of the characteristics of the topic sentence and how topic sentences can differ in terms of the role that they play. An understanding of the completeness should be taught after initial mastery of the topic sentence because the student will than have an awareness of the effect of the topic sentence on setting parameters for the paragraph. Then, development, coherence, and rhetorical function can be emphasized. Such an increasingly detailed analysis of the paragraph is one that should result in increasingly sophisticated writing intuitions. (HOD)

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Developing Paragraph "Intuition:" A Spiral Approach.

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Me: How do you know when to indent when you are writing?

Andy(ten years old): I indent when I change to a different subject.

Josh(twelve years old): When I finish covering a subject thoroughly.

Me: Do you always think to yourself "this is a new subject," or "I have covered the subject thoroughly" when you indent?

Andy: No...I read a lot and I sort of know when it's time for a new paragraph.

Josh: After about five sentences I indent....Besides, you better indent after a few sentences because teachers get angry if there are too few paragraphs.

This brief dialogue with my two sons demonstrates several characteristics of their preceptions about paragraphs. Both Josh and Andy have obviously been told by someone at school that paragraphs should be about one subject. However, they readily admitted that when they are writing, they make decisions to indent on intuititive grounds. The remark "I read a lot," by Andy and the five sentence categorization by Josh indicate that they have arrived at a sense of the conventional form of the paragraph. They "feel" that it's time to indent. Of course, the last comment by Josh about teacher's expectations made me wonder whether Josh would be as paragraph conscious in his writing outside of school as he might be in writing for school purposes.

In contrast to the boys' developing assumptions about the appropriate use of paragraphs my seven year old daughter demonstrated that she is totally unaware of the paragraph. She dictated a letter to me which I printed with indentations. When she copied the letter she ignored all of the indentations. Ruth has only recently begun to read

books above the beginner reader level, and she obviously has not had any paragraph instruction in the first or second grades.

My three children responded to paragraphing in ways appropriate to their age and grade level. Josh and Andy routinely indent because of intuitions based on a very simplified view of the paragraph gained from their school and reading experiences. Ruth has not had enough reading experience or instruction to have yet gained a sense of paragraphing. The boys also indicated that by the sixth and seventh grades it is assumed that the student can use the paragraph. The question that remains is will their paragraphing skills develop, will their intuitions about writing in general become more refined? Furthermore, what part will writing instruction play in this process?

For the purposes of this paper I will attempt to describe a sequence of instruction for teaching paragraph skills that I believe would have a significant impact on the development of writing skills. I believe that it is important for me to briefly describe some of my assumptions regarding the nature of the act of writing and the development of writing ability in order for the reader to understand the rationale behind my program. In addition I will explain why the paragraph is worthy of a great deal of attention at any stage of writing instruction.

As my children demonstrated, even at an early age they are guided by their intuitions as they write. William Irmscher suggests that from the very first time we write we use our intuitive resources of language in order to deal with the same factors that the most sophisticated writer is concerned with--"ideas or substance, feelings, arrangement,

structure and style." (Irmscher, 33) "Once we begin writing we are constantly making choices, not rational choices in the same sense that we apply reason to evidence and argument, but intuitive choices about words, arrangement and style. Choice of grammatical structures is primarily unintentional. I would advance that paragraphing is also." (Irmscher, 34) Where does writing instruction fit in the development of intuitions about language? Irmscher points out that definitions of intuition suggest that unlike instinct intuition is derived from education and experience. Intuitions are the culmination of "perceptions we accumulate, internalize and synthesize into patterns. However, they ca-not be crammed in; they are the result of "prolonged tuition." (Irmscher, 35) They take time to develop.

If systematic instruction is to play a part in the formation of intuitions about written language then it must be begun early and be continuous. Assuming this to be the case, Irmscher advises that writing tasks should "correspond to the primary interests of most children at a particular age." (Irmscher, 36) It would be equally as important to take into account their stage of cognitive development when planning writing instruction as Bruner suggests.

> Research on the intellectual development of the child highlights the fact that at each stage of development the child has a characteristic way of viewing the world and explaining it to himself. The task of teaching a subject to a child at any particular age is one of representing the structure of that subject in terms of child's way of viewing things. (Bruner, 412)

Relating composition instruction to developmental stages is not a new concern. In 1939 McKee lamented that the field of composition was in a "chaotic state" because of the dearth of objective data regarding

the items which children should learn, the grade placement of these items and the standards which children might be reasonably expected to reach. (McKee, 79) In 1977 Irmscher echoed McKee's call for more information about what students can do at different grade levels when he said that "teachers at all levels need to understand more about the learning process involved in writing at each level in order to plan instruction." (Irmscher, 34) We still do not have as much information as we would like to have about the relationship of cognitive stages to potential writing ability, but we must use the theoretical and empirical data we do have to plan sequenced instruction.

In addition, as Jerome Bruner suggests we must understand the structure of our subject very well in order to represent it "in terms of the child's way of viewing things." In reviewing the literature on the nature of the paragraph I discovered a variety of structural descriptions. In 1866 in his Manual of English Composition and Rhetoric Alexander Bain defined the paragraph as "the division of discourse next higher than the sentence which is a collection of sentences with unity of purpose." (Lewis, 20) Bain is recognized as the first writer on rhetoric to take serious interest in the paragraph, although many rhetoriticians have recently devoted attention to elaborate and detailed descriptions which fall into two categories: those which emphasize a theoretical construct based on the logic inherent in the subject being written about and those which are based on rhetorical consideration.

Frances Christensen is the most well known proponent of the structural approach. Christensen views the paragraph as a sequence of

"structurally related sentences." Sentences "develop from, depend on, or amplify the topic sentence." Christensen looks at the structure of the paragraph in terms of subordinate and coordinate sentences responsible for directions of modification. (Christensen, 52-82)

In contrast Sheridan Baker says that its best to think of the paragraph as "something for the reader's convenience rather than some granitic form laid down by matters of logic." (Baker, 16) Paul Rodgers agrees that paragraph indentation should be governed by rhetorical choice rather than logical internal structure. Stern, who quotes Rodgers, goes on to say that the paragraph should be conditioned by the psychologic and socio-logic of a particular rhetorical occasion. (Stern, 256) The argument for analyzing the structure of the paragraph in terms of a rhetorical view is supported by the research of Meade and Ellis as well as Richard Braddock. After studying the structure of paragraphs in various types of writing they discovered that the typical structurally-oriented categories taught in the schools simply do not occur "in pure form or with sufficient frequence to justify teaching them on the grounds that they are rhetorically useful." (Meade/Ellis, 193-200)

Frank D'Angelo's approach to characterizing the paragraph is the most useful for teaching purposes of the approaches I examined. D'Angelo says that although we paragraph for a variety of reasons--to change tone, shift rhythm, or to emphasize a point, the logic of the subject matter should be the most important consideration in developing paragraph structure and the starting off point for instruction. 'Understanding the logical basis of paragraphing is of primary importance in developing a sense of "form consciousness."' For D'Angelo composition

is an "organic development which begins with an intuitive grasp of the whole; paragraphing is the process of differentiating the parts." (D'Angelo, 219) In other words the writer must have a sense of his subject before he can begin to consider how he will present that subject to his reader. He should deal with the content before he deals with his audience.

Reflecting back on the appropriateness of organizing a curriculum "guided by a clear sense of the structure of the subject as well as student needs" (Bruner, 412) I would like to suggest a way of ordering paragraph instruction in light of consideration of the following questions:

1. Which qualities of the paragraph are the most essential in view of its purpose in discourse?
2. Which of these qualities should be repeatedly introduced at greater depth at various levels of instruction?
3. Which qualities should be introduced only after the student has demonstrated that he has mastered certain skills or because he has reached a certain developmental level?

It is important to point out that the pacing of instruction and the methodology would differ if all of the paragraphing skills were taught to the adult who perhaps had not had continuous writing instruction. However, I believe that the following ordering of qualities of the paragraph and skills in terms of importance and increasing complexity would still be the same.

1. Unity (each sentence contributes to the central thought of the paragraph)
   Skills: a) the ability to categorize facts or ideas
   b) the ability to identify a controlling idea
   c) the ability to use the controlling idea to generate the paragraph and the ability to recognize the restrictions of the controlling idea.

2. Completeness (the paragraph gives enough information to satisfy the reader)

   Skills: a) the ability to provide enough information to satisfy the reader and to sense completeness.

3. Development (methods of developing subject are appropriate)

   Skills: a) the ability to use various techniques of paragraph development

   b) the ability to use various levels of generalization for the purposes of development

4. Coherence (the relationship between ideas is clear)

   Skills: (structural coherence)
   a) the ability to order facts and ideas with respect to the inherent logic of the subject matter

   b) the ability to use various logical principles for structuring purposes

   (grammatical coherence)
   c) the ability to recognize and use semantic and grammatical constructions for transitional purposes

5. Rhetorical Function (intended impact on the reader and the function of various kinds of paragraphs when they appear in longer units of discourse.

   Skills: a) the ability to adjust paragraph form on the basis of audience considerations

   b) the ability to write introductory and concluding paragraphs as well as the typical developmental paragraph

In addition I would include as a part of a program of instruction in the writing of the paragraph or any other form of discourse suggested methods for invention, namely activities which should occur prior to the planning and articulation stage of writing whereby the writer accumulates material. Initially invention can be taught in terms of the ability to look "in an accurate and detailed way at the world of fact and idea." (Douglass, 190) At a later stage of writing instruction the student can learn how to use his personal experience and "private vision" (Winterowd, 127) as subject matter.

In the following section of my paper I will suggest a curriculum for teaching the paragraph on the elementary, secondary and college levels using this outline as a guide. Needless to say the outer boundaries of a categorization based on grade levels are quite arbitrary. However, I have decided on this division because it represents several broad cognitive stages as well as the conventional division of the American school system. For each category I will briefly describe the cognitive stage which accompanies it, primarily in Piagetean terms, and suggest the skills and teaching methods appropriate to the specific stage. Of course, one must always remember that this is a model; the teacher must always be sensitive to individual differences and modify her plans accordingly.

Piaget describes the stage of development of the seven to eleven year old age group as the stage of concrete operations. The child lacks the thinking skills for deliberate abstract activity during this time but he can be very logical about the concrete. He can focus on several aspects of a problem simultaneously but he is not relective, nor can be hypothesize about the theoretical possibilities of situations and ideas. (Encyclopedia, 144)

Vygotsky claims that because the child lacks thinking skills required for the abstract thought which writing demands the development of written speech will lag far behind the development of oral speech during this period. (Sawyer, 1075) However, writing instruction certainly can begin on the elementary level, primarily because of the child's ability to think logically. He can see relationships and draw conclusions from his perceptions provided that the material is not too abstract.

When to begin paragraph instruction depends in part on how much experience the child has had writing sentences. I agree with McKee who says that paragraph instruction should begin as a response to students writing longer pieces of discourse. (McKee, 8) The teacher can take her cue from her students. Christensen suggests putting off paragraphing until the sixth grade because he believes that early paragraph instruction will hamper fluency. (Christensen, xi) However, as my children indicated, and an examination of elementary school language arts text books demonstrate, writing tasks are introduced in the elementary grades which would be difficult to fulfill without knowledge of the paragraph. I believe that paragraphing as well as other writing conventions can be taught at this stage without loss of fluency if they are taught as ways of enhancing meaning rather than as devices for restricting the writer.

Instruction in paragraphing in these grades should focus on invention, writing a paragraph on one subject and the visual form of the paragraph. The teacher should concentrate on training the student to become an accurate observer. Christensen says that invention should reduce itself to observation at this level. (Christensen, xi) Of course, the subject matter should preferably be immediate and concrete. The student can be taught to place things in classes and ultimately to develop generalizations about these classes in the form of statements by listing reasons for placing them in these groups. Classifying the characteristics of objects is the beginning of learning how to recognize a controlling idea in all kinds of material. Mina Shaughnessy observed that many basic writing students at City University "are not certain of how a

recognizes a main idea or how he sets about finding one." (Shaughnessy; 245)

Development should be introduced only in terms of adding facts about the same subject. At this time I think even notions regarding completeness would muddy the waters. I know from my experiences with older students that many of them do not seem to be able to keep a paragraph confined to one subject. I think it would be wise to concentrate on the concept of unity during early instruction in paragraphing.

On the elementary level oral activities preceding and related to written activities are appropriate because children have not yet had a great deal of experience composing silently, by themselves. Group brainstorming and paragraph construction are effective ways to begin paragraphing. Strickland suggests dictation and McKee advocates copying paragraphs for the purpose of giving students an intuitive "feel" for the paragraph form. (Strickland, 18) (McKee, 85) Smith advocates outlining the paragraph with a pencil to emphasize the indentation feature. (Smith, 225)

Secondary and College Level Instruction

When we talk about relating writing instruction on the secondary and college level to the Piagetean model of cognitive development our guidelines are not as firm as they were for the seven to eleven age group because Piaget gives us only one category, the formal operational stage, to cover the teen-age years and adulthood. According to Piaget most of our students will have reached this stage between the ages of twelve and fourteen. Children enter this period, gradually depending

more on their intellect and less on the concrete. (Sawyer, 1076) They begin to attempt problems with abstract considerations and they become increasingly more adept at hypothetical thinking. (Encyclopedia, 144) Even the adolescent can deal with complex problems of reasoning.

How does thinking on the formal operational level become increasingly more complex? Piaget suggests that education may be one factor in hastening or retarding the development of formal operational thought. He recommends that the child must have increasingly more complex tasks to perform in order to advance cognitively.

Once a student has reached the formal operational stage all of the characteristics of paragraphing can be taught at various levels of sophistication. Using the "quality" classifications I suggested in my outline on pages six and seven as topics I will discuss the sequence of subskills I have recommended. However, before doing that, I would like to say a few words about teaching invention in the secondary school and college. In addition to listing as an invention technique students can be introduced to various kinds of heuristics such as "discovery through questioning," (Larson, 144-155) and tagmemics (Young, Becker and Pike) which are appropriate for dealing with increasingly more abstract topics. Free writing has also been found to be effective as an invention tool with some students. The skills which I am about to discuss are involved in planning and articulating discourse. Instruction in invention techniques must always precede or accompany the development of these skills.

Unity: On the secondary level continued practice in using various categorizing principles to sort and classify information should be encouraged. The type of subject matter will dictate the difficulty of the task. For example, O'Dea recommends that in junior high school students be asked to deal with subjects which are familiar to them. (O'Dea, 10) Students might explain a process or a procedure they are accustomed to using. After they have demonstrated facility in handling familiar material, they can progress to classifying new material.

Instead of simply generating a main idea students can be made aware of the characteristics of the topic sentence and how topic sentences can differ in terms of the role that they play. Casty points out that the more concrete the topic sentence is, the greater the limitations it imposes on the writer. He presents the student with criteria for appraising the level of generalization of the topic sentence and demonstrates how the topic sentence can be used to generate other sentences in the paragraph. (Casty, 179)

Initially the student was taught to simply arrive at a topic sentence. Gradually he can be asked to understand the thought process which has gone into this act. Eventually he can be taught to write paragraphs where the topic sentence does not appear at all or learn how to place the topic sentence in various positions within the paragraph in order to achieve specific rhetorical effects.

Completeness: An understanding of completeness should be taught after initial mastery of the topic sentence because the student will then have an awareness of the effect of the topic sentence on setting the

parameters for the paragraph. For example, it may suggest questions that must be answered or contain words that must be defined. Hopefully the student will begin to sense having met the reader's demands for explanation after he has practices fulfilling the demands of his own controlling idea.

Development: The concept of completeness is more basic to the integrity of the paragraph than the method used for arriving at completeness. The student must add information until completeness has been achieved. However some students may not be able to write a sufficiently developed paragraph before they are introduced to methods of development. If this is the case the two should be taught simultaneously.

O'Dea recommends introducing only two or three of the simpler methods of paragraph development such as reasons, examples, contrasts on the high school level. (O'Dea, 9) High school textbooks reflect this point of view. I agree that the secondary school student need not differentiate techniques of development any further for his writing purposes. However on the college level additional methods can be introduced because the student has probably absorbed the more basic concepts of paragraphing. He may be ready to focus on refining some of the specific skills he has been introduced to. With regard to development, he can finally be introduced to the idea that "there are obviously as many different ways of building successful paragraphs as there are subjects for paragraphs to discuss." (Winterowd, 45)

Coherence: Students do not have any trouble understanding that there should be a reason for the second sentence to follow the first, the third sentence to follow the second, etc. in a piece of discourse.

However, they must learn how to convince the reader that these reasons exist. Students should become aware of the inherent logic that informs subject matter and the options they have for arranging that subject matter. They can become sensitive to structural coherence by being asked to arrange material which has an obvious ordering principle. For example, time and space relationships are often inherent in narrative material. Initial exercises might include writing an account of your activities from the time you woke up in the morning until the time you entered school. Structuring possibilities are more numerous when dealing with ideas. Gradually the student can learn about structural coherence in various types of discourse through analysis and differentiated practice.

Instruction in grammatical and lexical strategies for the purpose of underlining the logical relationships between sentences should either accompany or follow discussions of structural coherence but should not procede them. While it is true that transitional words and phrases will help to achieve a sense of coherence they may convey a mistaken impression of coherence where none exists if they are used mechanically without attention to logical coherence.

Rhetorical Function: After the student has gained some proficiency writing paragraphs he can be introduced to the variety of roles the paragraph plays in a larger unit of discourse, such as an essay. Students would probably begin writing essays long before they had been introduced to some of the more sophisticated aspects of paragraphing. At that time they can study the function and forms of introductory and concluding paragraphs.

A student should be able to devote some attention to the needs of his audience soon after he has reached the formal operational stage and demonstrates his ability to hypothesize. Initially, as I have suggested, he can learn to sense the reader's need for complete information. Eventually he can learn to use the paragraph to convey a particular tone, shift of rhythm, or to emphasize a particular point because of the impression he wants to make on his reader. He can learn to indent for rhetorical as well as logical considerations.

Methods: I agree with D'Angelo and Winterowd who suggest increasingly detailed analysis as one important way of sensitizing students to the structural characteristics of the paragraph. They can look at a wide variety of discourse and note characteristics of the paragraphs within that discourse. They should also look at the function of the sentences within the paragraph. Of course, they should be asked to write various types of paragraphs which are the result of logical and rhetorical considerations.

"Professor Kitzhaber has said that the first 500 word theme precipitates all the problems of writing. (The commander has to train the troops while the battle is going on.) This inundation is inevitable if we start with discursive writing and restrict ourselves to it... If we start with the smaller units the student comes to writing longer discursive essays already able to write. (the troops are already trained.) (Christensen, xii) My own teaching experiences confirm Christensen's argument for paragraph instruction. I have found that students on the college level write very shallow essays unless I include attention to the paragraph. Although they may have had

paragraphing instruction it usually has been erratic. In some cases their intuitions about paragraphing have not developed beyond the intuitions of my children--they have a feeling that you are required to indent on occasion. If a student cannot write a good paragraph the chances are that he does not know much about writing.

In defense of a curriculum O'Dea suggested for the ninth grade which included a great deal of paragraph instruction, O'Dea said, that "the teacher who builds his entire composition unit around the paragraph need not be ashamed. If he has done his work well he has taught his students some competence in the most important skills that obtain in writing a dissertation or any piece of extended writing." (O'Dea, 9) A student who has learned to classify material, recognize controlling ideas, create coherence and completeness in paragraphs is well on his way to becoming a good writer. In addition if he can learn how to convey rhetorical decisions in his paragraphs he will most likely be able to transfer these skills to any kind of discourse.

Alvina Burrows said in a discussion about sequencing writing instruction that qualitative rather than quantitative principles should govern the ordering of writing instruction. She added that there is nothing harder to write than one paragraph. (Evertts, 111) I have tried to argue for instruction in paragraphing based on a qualitative design. Regardless of when this instruction takes place, it should result in increasingly sophisticated writing intuitions. If this instruction occurs over a long period of time the chances are greater that this goal will be reached.

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